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ABSTRACT

The Wadena Public School District 819 (Minnesota) has a career education curriculum that includes the following: (1) emphasis on self-esteem, decision making, and work ethic integrated into other subjects in elementary schools; (2) increased emphasis on these areas in home economics, industrial arts, English, science, and mathematics in junior high school, along with individual meetings with guidance counselors; and (3) integrated and direct instruction and experiences that focus on guided career exploration and course selection in senior high school. According to a survey of teachers, the strength of the program is the high level of awareness of and instruction directed toward career development needs in senior high school and integrated activities in the elementary school. Teachers cited the following program weakenesses: lack of K-12 planning and delivery of a career education strand in the curriculum, lack of resources, and low level of awareness of career education in the elementary and junior high school. Students surveyed saw areas of greatest need as self-analysis, job-seeking skills, and ability to locate information on careers. Recommendations for improvement include increasing use and accessibility of resources, creating greater awareness of infused career education/work readiness learner outcomes, and clearly articulating a K-12 career education curriculum. (13 references) (KC)

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CAREER EDUCATION

WADENA PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

by

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INTRODUCTION

"I don't know what kind of work I'd like - or be good at. I can't decide if I should go to a technical college or a four year university. In which occupations will there be openings?" As a high school teacher I sense student's feeling overwhelmed by their great number of options and frustrated by their inability to make decisions. How could we let kids progress to this stage of education with so little information and skill concerning career choice? The main purpose of this paper will be to study:

1. What our school is doing at present to help students with career planning.
2. What our school can do in the future to better prepare students to make appropriate decisions regarding career preparation and choice.

THE POPULATION

The students and career development programs being studied are that of the Wadena Public School District 819, Wadena, MN. Wadena is a rural community located in northwestern Minnesota with a population of approximately 4,000 people. The average class size is 100 students, consisting of an all-white population with minority groups being virtually non-existent. What is presently being done in regards to career development will be discussed concerning grades K-12. The discussion of what should be done in the future will focus on grades K-6. The reasoning for this format is this: through my research I feel the main emphasis on career development takes place in the 11th and 12th grades at Wadena Public; through my interaction with students I conclude that this emphasis is too little and too late.

WHAT IS PRESENTLY BEING DONE

The Wadena PER Committee has been addressing this issue extensively during the 89-90 and 90-91 school years. The following is their listing of the career education curriculum in place at Wadena Public School during the 89-90 school year:

"1. Elementary - self esteem, decision making, and work ethic are integrated into core areas such as reading, language arts, and social studies.

2. Junior High - increased emphasis on self concept, decision making, and student awareness of individual interests and abilities. Individual meetings with the guidance counselor as well as integration of career information into areas such as home economics, industrial arts, English, science, and math.

3. Senior High - opportunities for career education are available through integrated and direct instruction and experiences which focus on guided career exploration and course selection." (Wadena Schools Career Education/Work Readiness Curriculum, a Preliminary Report to the PER Committee, 1989-90)

The PER's goal was to assess Wadena's Career Education/Work Readiness Program. Three assessment activities were conducted: a survey of all teachers, a survey of current juniors and seniors (classes of 1990 and 1991), and an internal audit of resources. The results are summarized below:

TEACHER SURVEY

"STRENGTHS OF THE PROGRAM:

1. High level of awareness for and instruction directed toward these needs in the senior high and integrated/infused activities in the elementary.

WEAKNESSES OF THE PROGRAM:

1. Lack of K-12 planning and delivery of a career education/work readiness strand in the curriculum.
2. Lack of resources/accessability to resources/awareness of resources for career education/work readiness.
3. Low level of awareness at the elementary and junior high school of the need to infuse career education/work readiness learner outcomes into the curriculum.

TEACHER'S RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Resources supporting individual grade levels and disciplines be developed or purchased.
2. Staff development to make teachers aware of the need for career education/work readiness strands in the curriculum and inform them of the resources.
3. A clearly articulated K-12 program of infused career education/work readiness learner outcomes.

STUDENT SURVEY

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS INDICATES STRONGEST NEED IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

1. Self-understanding
2. Developing job-seeking skills, especially resume preparation and job locating skills.
3. Ability to locate information on careers

The PER committee concluded that the students comments on self-understanding and the ability to locate information on careers have implications for the junior high and elementary program areas.

RESOURCE AUDIT

1. The resources used most at the senior high level included job information manuals such as the Dictionary of Occupation Titles, Occupational Outlook Handbook, and the Minnesota Computer Information Service (MCIS). While many support resources for specific discipline areas were listed, most teachers noted that the resources included dated information or that they were unaware of or unable to access resources such as those listed above.
2. Teachers in the junior high and the elementary noted an absence of resources to support instruction.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE:

1. Locate resources in a central location
2. Catalog district resources
3. Greater awareness regarding infused career education/work readiness learner outcome." (Summary of the assessment of Wadena's Career Education/Work Readiness Program, 1989-90)

The PER committee has done an excellent job in evaluating what is presently being done in career education/development at the Wadena Public School. This work provides a good basis on which to make future plans. However, the system may paint a better picture of itself than it deserves.

Some examples of the distortion follow:

1. It was reported that senior high school teacher surveys indicate that there is ample awareness and integration of career education in senior high classes; yet many surveys were not returned. More study is needed to determine what teachers who did not return their surveys are doing in regards to career education.
2. It was reported that when MN Dept. of Educ. model learner outcomes become available, teachers will receive inservice on those outcomes. This is definitely a step in the right direction, but more needs to be done. An inservice concerning career model learner outcomes is needed. Teachers can choose which learner outcomes they will emphasize or ignore in their curriculums. They need to be informed why the outcomes related to careers are important. This would also help teachers who do not yet have the Minnesota Department of Education learner outcomes develop their own viable career education learner outcomes.
3. The use of the MCIS has been loaded on the networked system and is available for student and faculty use in the Media Center at the senior high school. The practice of students using the system without professional supervision is questionable.
4. No one person has been indicated to implement a K-12 planning and delivery of a career education/work readiness strand in the curriculum.
5. No plan has been indicated to improve the low level of awareness at the elementary and junior high school of the need to infuse career education/work readiness learner outcomes into the curriculum.

The pattern of unanswered concerns and the addition of more questions seemed to be constant as I researched and interviewed career development at Wadena Public School.

Because of the belief that the third grade does a substantial amount of work in career development, third grade teacher Darlene Leonard was interviewed. She stated, "Nothing was being done in her class on career education." After some thought she stated, "We do talk about some careers in our social unit; when we talk about the city, we talk about the streetworker and the mayor. I don't do that much." If this elementary teacher was aware of the National Career Development and Guidelines for children at the elementary level, she would know she is doing a lot

more to prepare children for the world of work than she knows. Or perhaps she really is doing very little in terms of career development. Someone must be responsible for informing teachers about what career development is, why it is important, and what the components are for various grade levels. "All people involved in the school system need to learn that "career development is self-development of the person over the life span through the synthesis of roles, settings, and events of his or her life" (Hoffman & McDaniels, p. 163, Elementary School Guidance & Counseling, Feb. 91, Vol. 25).

The Wadena Public School is a part of the Leaf River Education District. The Director of the Education District, Faith Raniski, was interviewed to determine what the education districts involvement is in career education. She was very well informed about the National Career Development Guidelines, the State Board Rules and Amendments, and expected learner outcomes regarding career development/education. She pointed out that there are subject areas to be integrated into all courses and programs, and that because of the large number of requirements and the need for integration into every class, few schools can instantly produce their career education/work readiness curriculum. The Director emphasized a few of the graduation outcomes and competencies and noted that while these competencies seem far-removed from the elementary, to recall that in Outcome Based Education, exit outcomes are set and students start working toward those outcomes the minute they walk in the door of the school. She also stated that most people feel it will take until the year 2000 for the outcomes and competencies process to develop.

Nancy Rach, Social Worker/Counselor at the Leaf River Education District was also interviewed. Nancy works three days/week for the Wadena Elementary School. Nancy's main concern with career education is with self-esteem. She wants kids to learn who they are, that they have value, and to know what their options are. She stated the Wadena Public School is investigating many available curriculums related to career development. Nancy is presently using The Nebraska Career Guidance Program Handbook, a K-12 curriculum, in both the classroom and small groups. "This program is cross-referenced with the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC) career guidance competencies and has goals and objectives from the National Career Development Association and the American School Counselor Association. The curriculum provides learning activities that will aid students in identifying their own strength, developing interpersonal skills, and a greater awareness of the interrelationship between home, school, and community. An example of a kindergarten activity is "Working Together". Students are asked to choose a partner and then to sit back to back with their legs straight out in front. By interlocking arms and pushing against each other's backs, they try to stand up together as one unit. Follow-up questions include: How did you help each other? What things do we need others to help us with? (Nebraska Career Guidadnce Program handbook, p. 11). This is a very good curriculum. The ideas sound like things kids would love to do, and Nancy states students ask to do more activities from this curriculum. Worksheets, resources, and additional activities are included or listed. The national guidelines that are met by each exercise are listed with that exercise, as well as an evaluation for each exercise.

WHAT OUR SCHOOL CAN DO IN THE FUTURE

Faith and Nancy are considering purchasing the DUSO-R. The DUSO-1(R) is used for grades K-2 and the DUSO-2(R) is for grades 3-4. These programs use puppets to introduce "activities that help children learn how to gain beginning social skills, become aware of feelings, priorities, and choices, develop a positive self-image and build an appreciation of individual strengths .. and to provide a greater understanding of feelings, opportunities to choose solutions, suggest alternatives, and predict and understand consequences, ways to build effective communication and decision-making skills." (DUSO-R promotional advertisement). The DUSO-2(R) received high praise in the Elementary School Guidance and Counseling periodical. "Following an 8-week treatment period (3 hours per week), children exposed to DUSO-2(R) made significantly greater gains with respect to general social, and total self-esteem than did those given more attention via entertainment activities such as art, crafts, and stories. (Morse, Bockoven and Bettesworth, 1988, p. 200). Studies have also indicated that the positive effects of DUSO-2 are long-term. "Maintenance effects were evident for the DUSO-2 group in relation to changes in the child's knowledge of socially acceptable standards. Terry Kottman indicates that using games, stories, metaphors and role playing (and, I assume, puppets) are very beneficial methods of working with children at this age. These methods make children feel safe. (Kottman, 1990, p. 140). The consideration of new curriculum and the constant surveyance of the needs of students and assessment to determine if those needs are being met must continue.

CONCLUSION

I feel the Wadena Public School system has made significant progress in the development of a valid career development program. The first step, determining what is presently being done, was determined by the PER Committee's study of Wadena's Career Education/Work Readiness Program. This same group assessed needs and made recommendations. The curriculums presently being used appear to be appropriate. Efforts are being made both by the Leaf River Education District Director and the Elementary Social Worker/Counselor to find other curriculums that meet the students and teachers needs. When curriculums are found I assume inservice workshops will be held to educate the teachers of the importance of career education, which curriculums are available, and how to use those curriculums. I hope a clearly articulated K-12 program of infused career education/work readiness learner outcomes is developed and implemented. The world of work takes up the vast majority of our waking world, thus the importance of work in relationship to happiness is paramount. "Committing to lifelong learning, interpreting change, and developing personally are the only secure ways of developing careers that meet [peoples] needs as well as their many employers' needs." (Feller, p. 19, March 1991). We must teach each child (s)he is valuable, how to get along with others, how to make good decisions, how to adapt to their ever-changing world, how to fit into the world of work, and how to mesh their personality and their personal life with their world of work. The Wadena Public School System is on its way to meeting these needs.

RESOURCES

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